

FACT SHEET

Profile of Accreditation

WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

Accreditation is a process of external quality review used by higher education to review colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. In the U.S., accreditation is carried out by private, nonprofit organizations designed for this specific purpose.

Institutions and educational programs seek accredited status as a means of demonstrating their academic quality to students and the public and to become eligible for federal funds.

TYPES AND NUMBERS OF RECOGNIZED ACCREDITORS

Types of Accreditors

o *Regional:* Regional accreditors operate in six specific clusters of states (regions) in the U.S. and review entire institutions, 97.4% or more of which are both degree-granting and nonprofit. There are 2,963 regionally accredited institutions.

o *National:* National accreditors operate throughout the country and review entire institutions, 35.9% of which are degree-granting and 64.0% of which are non-degree-granting; 20.9% are non-profit and 79.0% are for-profit. There are 3,458 nationally accredited institutions. Many are single-purpose institutions focusing on, e.g., education in business and information technology. Some are faith-based.

o *Specialized:* Specialized accreditors operate throughout the country and review programs and some single-purpose institutions. There are 18,713 of these accredited programs and single-purpose operations.

PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation serves the following purposes:

o *Assuring Quality.* Accreditation is the primary means by which colleges, universities and programs assure academic quality to students and the public.

o *Access to Federal Funds.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is required in order for students to gain access to federal funds such as student grants and loans and other federal support.

o *Easing Transfer.* Accreditation of institutions and programs is important to students for smooth transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities.

o *Engendering Employer Confidence* Accredited status of an institution or program is important to employers when evaluating credentials of job applicants and providing financial support to current employees seeking additional education.